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4TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE!

HOME & FASHION ISSUE

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TENANT LIST Clockwise from top left: Iron Side founder Ofer Mizrahi; a nighttime view into the Odegard showroom; a vignette in the Rita Motta shop; a recent event at the Coverings Etc. space

Pioneer Spirit

By merging community, creativity and retail, Iron Side ushers in a new brand of urban renewal. | *By Riki Altman* |

The area of Northeast Fourth Court adjacent to the Florida East Coast Railway corridor in the MiMo District doesn't offer much in terms of vistas, what with its weathered Creole signs announcing Sunday church services and single-story houses sharing modest lot lines. But then, if you pay close attention and don't blink too long, glimpses of glass-enclosed showrooms reveal themselves through rusty gates and slabs of stone on the west side of the road between 73rd and 79th streets. These are the first indicators of Iron Side, the city's newest qualifier in the hip habitat movement.

Israeli-born Ofer Mizrahi, who moved to Miami 14 years ago, envisioned Iron Side nearly a decade ago. His company, Coverings Etc., sells natural stone surfaces and eco-friendly, recycled materials. His first purchase in the complex was a storage space for the product displayed in his Wynwood showroom. "When I chose this warehouse, the area was bad," he recalls. "[But] we're not afraid of the bad areas." Undeterred by the neighborhood's shady reputation, Mizrahi moved his showroom over in 2006 and bought another warehouse next door for storage purposes. Last year, he combined the properties. Soon enough, the showroom-owner-turned-developer was masterminding a real-life Sims game, placing hand-picked professionals and the industries they represented—along with wildcards, like an indoor soccer field and a gargantuan event space—in made-to-order environments. Today, the more than 40 Iron Side tenants include designers, architects, artists, retailers, and even a hair stylist and cook.

The development is named for the railway tracks it is nestled against—in fact, a few times a day the locomotives can even be seen, heard and felt, though the sound is muffled by the hundreds of trees planted throughout the property. Iron Side's occupancy is growing "organically, in a nice way" says Mizrahi. "Nobody came to us by soliciting or through a broker. It's all word-of-mouth."

Rents range from about \$400 a month for a small studio to \$10,000 for a cavernous warehouse. Empty spaces serve as storage units for Coverings Etc. until a renter shows interest, then the space is converted according to said renter's needs: an office, a showroom or even a live/work space. As a result, a close-knit commune has emerged within the enclosed three-block area. "The [tenants] feed each other ideas," adds Mizrahi. "The synergy is great."

"You have your own privacy, but you develop relationships," concurs Rita Motta, a product designer whose eponymous shop carries everything from 3D paper houses to a wedding gown made of bubble wrap. "You can call somebody and say, 'Look what I've been doing.'"

Collaborations follow in myriad ways. Motta has a golden cabinet for sale in the Odegard showroom, another tenant, and painter Kelly Holden, who lives and works in a townhouse-like unit with a sun-filled flooded studio on the ground floor, was recently commissioned to work on a mural for the client of another Iron Side neighbor, designer Deborah Wecselman.

"We have an opportunity to build a creative community and [re-brand] this city as an art [destination]," says Mizrahi. "That's what we want to be." **M**